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AUTHOR Chissom, Brad; And Others
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ABSTRACT

To explore several categories of variables strongly associated with professional satisfaction and dissatisfaction in American middle schools, responses of 540 out of 900 targeted middle school teachers to two open-ended questions were analysed. (The two survey items were drawn from the Status of the U.S. American Middle School Teacher Questionnaire.) The results showed 9 major categories contributing to professional satisfaction and 12 contributing to dissatisfaction. Some categories were supported by previous research, and others were not. Of the nine encouraging categories, faculty cooperation, curriculum features, and working conditions drew the greatest response, followed by personal directions, community support, family support, desire to help youth, faculty attitude and enthusiasm, and moral obligation and religious support. Among dissatisfiers, working conditions, professional prestige, and student behavior headed the list, followed by classroom management bureaucracy, materials and equipment adequacy, administration, job stress, and other factors. This study found that some categories (like working conditions) can be both encouraging and discouraging influences, depending on the school involved. Middle school administrators and policymakers are urged to identify the categories operating in their own schools in order to implement effective and corrective solutions. Included are three tables and nine references. (MLH)

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A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF CATEGORIES OF VARIABLES ASSOCIATED WITH PROFESSIONAL SATISFACTION AND DISSATISFACTION AMONG MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

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BY
BRAD CHISSOM,
PRINCE C.O. CHUKABARAH,
THOMAS J. BUTTERY, and
KENNETH T. HENSON

The University of Alabama

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Introduction

Professional satisfaction and dissatisfaction in American Middle Schools (grades 6 to 8) are thought to be associated with several categories of variables. The variables that indicate enhancement of professional satisfaction among middle school teachers may be considered as those elements in the teachers' situations which encourage and help the teachers most in rendering the best possible service on their jobs. In contrast, the variables that indicate professional dissatisfaction and problems may be considered as those elements which discourage and/or hinder the middle school teachers most in rendering the best service of which they are capable.

The climate within the school, quality of teaching conditions, time spent teaching and/or planning, and teaching loads can significantly influence the quality of teachers' instructions (Henson et al., 1986a) as well as their professional satisfaction and problems. In general, middle school teachers have good working conditions (Henson et al., 1986a). The climate variable should be expected to contribute significantly to the teachers' professional satisfactions. On the other hand, middle school teachers have been found to "feel a need for more information about discipline, classroom management, teaching methodology, an audio-visual aids" (Henson et al., 1986a, p. 6). Categories of variables such as this should be expected to contribute to professional dissatisfaction and problems among American middle school teachers.

Henson et al. (1985) have also reported findings of their study in which they developed a profile on the personal lives and family attributes of middle school teachers, especially as these categories of variables relate to the middle school teachers' membership and affiliations to the local community and the nation. The authors used a similar questionnaire as that employed by the

National Educational Association (NEA, 1962). However, Henson et al. (1985) focused their study on attributes or categories of variables such as economic status, age, marital status, sex, and family status. In particular, Henson et al. (1985) found that:

> the most common reason given (by 33% of the teachers) for choosing teaching as a career is a desire to work with young people. The second most common reason for choosing teaching is that middle school teachers consider teaching as an important service (19.1%). A third common reason is that teaching permits the teachers to follow their interest in their subject fields(s) (17%) (p. 14).

The third reason is supported by findings in Henson et al.'s (1986) study which reported that "sixty-eight percent of the middle school teachers do not teach any courses out of their fields and another ten percent teach less than ten percent of their assignments outside their major fields." (p. 4).

In addition, the authors found that middle school teachers have a very strong sense of belonging relative to their local communities, as evidenced by the teachers' commitment of time and money in various community affairs, activities, associations, churches, meetings, organizations, clubs, politics/public service, and other programs. Since middle school teachers consider these categories of variables as favorable attributes in their profession, one would expect the same variables to appear in the categories of variables that contribute to middle school teachers' professional satisfaction. Also since most middle school teachers perceive teaching as a low to medium prestige profession (Henson et al., 1985), this category of variables should be found as a contributor to the teachers' professional dissatisfaction. More than half of the 1552 respondents to the 18th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public School questionnaire mentioned either drugs or discipline rather than financial support as the most important problem in public schools (Gallup, 1986). Although these

respondents were not defined as middle school teachers per se, their perceptions and responses seem to parallel those of middle school teachers. The Poll also reported that the public still feels that teachers are paid salaries comparatively well below other professions. These categories of variables (drugs, discipline problems, and low salaries) should also be expected to contribute to middle school teachers' professional dissatisfaction. Also, categories such as heavy teaching loads, discipline, insufficient time for planning and unnecessary extra-curricular activities have been pinpointed by Henson et al., (1986) as areas of teachers' needs that require attention in attempting to improve instruction in middle schools. The average public-school teacher works 47.3 hours a week, and about 43 percent of this time is required by duties other than classroom instruction (NEA 1962).

In a study that measured the perceptions of the middle school by contemporary teachers, Henson et al., (1986c) specified certain characteristics of the school environments which seemed to have definitive effects on teachers' perceptions of their jobs or profession. The investigators listed some of these characteristics as: (1) the amount of total teaching time spent in teaching grades or subject areas outside the teachers' major fields, (2) the total number of class periods that middle school teachers teach per week, (3) the average member of pupils per teacher per day, (4) the average length of class periods, (5) the number of planning periods per week, (6) length of time per day middle school teachers are required to be with students, (7) the length of the school day, and (8) the average number of days in a middle school year. This listing can be categorized into work load and time availability variables which have been found by the same investigators as areas that could detract measurably from middle school teachers' satisfaction. Other areas explored by these investigators included job related stress/strain or tension and community-

induced pressures and/or restrictions. However, whether these categories of variables influence professional satisfactions or not has not been conclusively resolved.

Schlechty and Vance (1981) conducted a longitudinal study of North Carolina teachers. They wanted to find out whether or not academically able teachers leave education. They found that a strong negative correlation existed between academic ability and retention in teaching. They also found that the number of white females who enter teaching has declined in North Carolina while the number of white males did not. They suggested that certain market forces may be responsible for this sex differential effect, such as new occupational opportunities for white females. Low teacher salaries were cited as a possible explanation for the negative correlation.

These and other categories of variables associated with professional satisfactions and problems in the middle schools suggest that there is a need to examine the degree or extent to which the variables actually contribute to professional satisfactions and/or problems as evidenced by responses from the teachers themselves. Middle school system/management would then have policy reappraisals and corrective measures in its attempts to promote professional satisfactions and reduce professional problems. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze responses that middle school teachers provided to two open ended questions on a questionnaire related to the teachers' professional satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This study was a part of a larger study which major findings have been reported previously (Henson et al., 1986a, 1986b).

INSTRUMENTS:

The instrument was the Status of The U.S. American Middle School Teacher Questionnaire, a modified version of the original questionnaire used by the NEA Research Division (NEA, 1967). The modified version contained sections A through I. Section A focused on the teachers' professional preparations; Section B evaluated the respondents' teaching experiences; Section C examined the nature of the respondents' present teaching assignments; Section D explored the teachers' professional growth activities; Section E sought to determine the teachers' economic status; Section F asked questions related to the teacher and his/her family; Section G elicited responses concerning the teacher and his/her community; Section H dealt with Retrospect and Prospects with respect to the teachers' choice of teaching as a career; Section I required the respondents to indicate what elements encouraged or discouraged them in their jobs, and thus affected their professional satisfactions and problems.

The last section (Section I) of the questionnaire was employed and analyzed in the present study, and comprised only two items. But since these two items were open-ended questions there were as many, or more, and as varied responses as there were respondents. The two items comprising Section I are repeated below:

(1) WHAT ELEMENTS IN YOUR PRESENT SITUATIONS AS A TEACHER ENCOURAGE AND HELP YOU MOST TO RENDER THE BEST SERVICE OF WHICH YOU ARE CAPABLE?

(2) WHAT ELEMENTS IN YOUR PRESENT SITUATIONS AS A TEACHER DISCOURAGE OR HINDER YOU MOST IN RENDERING THE BEST SERVICE OF WHICH YOU ARE CAPABLE?

A qualitative method for evaluating the data seemed to be the most relevant because quantitative research appears to have failed in pinpointing the most dynamic variables such as the demands and stresses of working conditions which seriously affect the availability of today's public school

teachers (Berry et al., 1985). Bird (1984) has also called for the application of qualitative research methodology in this area in order to discover the factors, problems, causes, and the behavioral and institutional characteristics of the teacher supply-demand dynamics. Berry et al. (1985) believe that, in addition to other teacher related problems, qualitative responses to the right questions about teacher satisfaction/dissatisfaction have begun to reveal significant factors. They also believe that qualitative research is "necessary for policy and policy implementation" (p. 109).

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES:

Nine hundred survey questionnaires were mailed to a sample of middle school teachers in the U.S. during Spring 1985. Five hundred and forty completed and usable questionnaires were returned, representing a 60% return rate. There were 145 males and 395 females, representing 27% and 73% respectively. The respondents' ages range from 22 to 64 years, with an average age of 38.2 years. Forty-seven percent have been in the same system for their entire career. Sixty-one percent have not had a break in service; and among those who did, 20% was for maternity leave. The sample was thus a relatively stable and experienced one, and was also representative of middle school teachers nationwide. Their teaching experience ranged from 1 to 40 years with eleven percent having less than five years experience. The average experience was 12.8 years as a full time teacher.

A cover letter was attached to the questionnaire explaining to the teacher what the study was about, its professional uses, and its benefits. All responses from the respondents were strictly confidential and were analyzed anonymously. Directions for completing the questionnaire were stated clearly, and each item was constructed in such a way that little or no ambiguity was encountered by the respondents. The teachers were asked to respond to all items in the questionnaire.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES:

The first item in Section I of the questionnaire asked for encouraging elements, while the second item asked for discouraging elements. For each set of elements (encouraging vs discouraging) a total count of the various elements was performed. A list of each set of elements was made with the coded respondent's identification number written against the response element. Next each list of response elements was placed on a card which used a code to identify the respondent. Then the cards containing the response elements were reorganized and categorized on the basis of semantic and contextual similarities. All elements that had similar or identical semantic meaning and/or contextual interpretation were grouped together. The resultant categories represented the underlying areas of response.

A validity check was performed by putting all the written responses on cards together and having two of the investigators carry out independent and separate sorting and clustering of the responses according to semantic and contextual/interpretive similarities. There was more than 90% agreement or concurrence between the clustering or categorizations. For the encouraging categories there were nine groups of homogeneous response elements, while 12 groups were found for the discouraging categories.

Simple frequencies and percents were calculated for each category as well as the total categories in each set of response elements. The percents were calculated on the basis of the total number of response elements in each set, and not on the total number of respondents.

RESULTS

The results of this study revealed nine encouraging categories and 12 discouraging categories (see Tables 1 and 2). These categories are briefly presented below. There were 85 and 655 response elements derived from items 1 and 2 respectively in Section I of the questionnaire. The eighty-five response elements were assigned to the encouraging categories, while the 655 response elements were assigned to the discouraging categories. The category names were assigned by the authors according to the predominant theme indicated by the response elements and by using the actual terms used by the teachers who responded to the questionnaire.

ENCOURAGING CATEGORIES:

(I) The first category was labeled Faculty Cooperation. It consisted of response elements which dealt with cooperation among teachers, influence of teachers, interaction with colleagues, team concepts, supportive administration, positive feedback from supervisors, and outstanding faculty. This seemed to be the most important encouraging factor since it had the largest number of response elements totaling 21 (See Table 1).

(II) The Curriculum Features category comprised such response elements as excellent facilities, technological advances, class sizes, adequate books/supplies, workshops/conferences, classroom aids, secretarial support, group/individual counseling, excellent discipline policy, excellent media center, location of school, and nearness of university/or colleges. This category was the second most important encouraging factor. It had 13 response elements.

(III) The next category was called Working Conditions. It was the third most important encouraging factor. It consisted of 12 response elements. These elements included pay increases, PTA freedom, plenty of planning time,

planning periods, curriculum, schedule flexibility, subject matter, summer vacation, inservice, and relaxed atmosphere.

(IV) The fourth category was named Personal Directions. The component response elements included inner drive, personal code of ethics, personal sense of responsibility, self-motivation, will-power, experience/perseverance, conscience, and fairness. This factor was the fourth most important (See Table 1), with ten response elements.

(V) The fourth category was Community Support which comprised response elements such as a supportive community, association with non-colleagues, parental appreciation, outside (parental, etc.) support, and participation in local education associations.

(VI) The next category was Family Support consisting of spousal support, family relation support, students' influence, and teachers having children of their own.

(VII) The seventh category was the Desire to Help Youths. Response elements here included admiration from students, positive feedback from students, student accomplishments, student enthusiasm, working with young people, concern for the handicapped, and teachers positive influence upon students.

Insert Table 1 About Here

(VIII) Faculty Attitude and Enthusiasm was the eighth category. It consisted of response elements such as teachers' enjoyment of what they do, personal conviction, dedication to the profession, moral obligation to students, enjoyment of teaching, and deep interest as a professional.

(IX) Moral Obligation and Religious Support, the last category, dealt with such elements as religion, concern for Jesus, and prayer.

DISCOURAGING CATEGORIES:

(I) The first category was labeled Working Conditions. Its components included distance to the work place, working conditions, work environment, many non-teaching activities, work load, and time, for a total of 176 response elements. This was the most important factor in terms of the number of response elements.

(II) The second discouraging category was Professional Prestige, which consisted of 147 response elements (See Table 2). Examples of the response elements included poor career prestige, low pay, home/parental support, negative attitudes by the public, unappreciative students/public, unfair treatment of teachers, criticisms, lack of respect, and lack of reinforcement.

(III) For the Student Behavior category, the component response elements included student discipline, student behavior, student apathy, and student morals. There were a total of 113 response elements.

(IV) Administrative details, bureaucratic red tape, committee meetings, and clerical tasks often described as "paper work" were the components of the Classroom Administration category. There were a total of 73 response elements in this category.

(V) The Materials and Equipment category comprised response elements such as physical space, class size, remedial material, and supplies/materials. The total number of elements in this category was 60.

(VI) Response elements like central office, negative attitudes, leadership problems, school board, and coordination were the components of the Administration category.

Insert Table 2 About Here

(VII) Job pressure, burnout, stress, fatigue, frustration, discouragement, and self-actualization comprised the Job Stress category. A total of 18 response elements were found in this category.

(VIII) The rest of the discouraging response elements were not easily categorizable. They were therefore put in a mixed category labeled Miscellaneous.

(IX) Scheduling and Curriculum category consisted of scheduling and curriculum only. There were seven response elements on scheduling and five on curriculum, for a total of 12.

(X) Communication was the tenth discouraging category. It consisted of six response elements, all directly referring to dissatisfactions and problems with communication in middle schools.

(XI) New Certification category consisted of five response elements only. All of the elements were directly related to middle school teachers' dissatisfaction with new certification procedures and other certification problems.

(XII) Collective Bargaining was the last category, and was made up of only two response elements.

DISCUSSION

A. Encouraging categories: The Desire to Help Youths or work with young people was one of the encouraging categories contributing to middle school teachers' satisfaction. This finding is strongly supported by those of Henson et al. (1985) whose study found that the most common reason given by middle school teachers for choosing teaching as a career was, in descending order of importance a desire to work with young people. This was followed by consideration of teaching as an important service, and the fact that teaching permits the teachers to follow their interest in their subject field.

This finding seems to confirm that desire to help youths and work with young people does contribute to Middle School teachers' professional satisfactions. Similar findings were observed by Berry et al. (1985) who reported that teachers chose to stay in teaching jobs because of a love of children/adolescents, commitment to teaching, and a reluctance to move laterally in the labor or career markets.

The presence of a Community Support category, participation in community activities, and affiliations with community/teacher groups and associations such as Local Education Associations were also corroborated. Henson et al. (1985) found that Middle School teachers in general have a strong sense of belonging to their communities. These teachers make various commitments of time, money, and services to their communities.

Working conditions seemed to have both encouraging and discouraging impacts. Henson et al. (1985) noted that middle school teachers generally experience good working conditions. But the present study did not provide much support; rather working conditions were expressed as both encouraging and discouraging.

B. Discouraging categories: Response elements related to working conditions in Middle Schools were also categorized as being discouraging in this study. In analyzing current teaching assignments in terms of the amount of time teachers have for planning, Henson et al. (1985) found that one-fourth of the teachers surveyed perceived their work load as heavy, while 22 percent said that their job was more than moderately heavy. These results suggest that work load is a discouraging element that contributes to middle school teachers' dissatisfaction. Discipline problems, found as an inadequacy by Henson et al. (1985), was replicated as a discouraging element in the current study. Further support for Working Conditions as a discouraging category is provided by Berry et al. (1985) whose study revealed the discouraging response

elements shown in Table 3. These elements were comparable to those in Table 2. Most of these discouraging elements (see Table 3) are identical with those found in the present study.

Insert Table 3 About Here

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

Several categories of variables were thought to be strongly associated with professional satisfaction and dissatisfaction in American Middle Schools. To examine the nature and content of such categories, a section of a survey questionnaire containing the responses of 540 Middle School teachers to two open-ended questions were analyzed. The results revealed nine major categories of variables that contribute to professional satisfaction in Middle Schools as well as 12 categories that contribute to professional dissatisfaction. Some of these categories found support and agreement from previous studies in the literature, but a few were not specifically replicated.

The encouraging categories were Faculty Cooperation; Desire to Help Youths; Student Attitude and Enthusiasm; Community Support; Family Support; Working Conditions; Curriculum Features; Personal Directions; Faculty Cooperation and Moral Obligation and Religious Support. The discouraging categories were Working Conditions; Collective Bargaining; Administration; Student Behavior; Materials and Equipment; Communication; Classroom Administration; Scheduling and Curriculum; Job Stress; New Certification; Professional Prestige; and Miscellaneous.

On the basis of frequency of the response elements in each category it was concluded that many categories of variables do contribute substantially to

professional satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction, although these categories vary in the degree to which they make their contributions. Some of the categories may have positive, encouraging influences in some middle schools while the same categories would have negative, discouraging influences in another. School administrators and policy-makers are urged to examine and identify the categories operative in their own middle schools in order to implement effective and corrective solutions.

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TABLE 1

Encouraging Categories of Professional Satisfactions in Middle Schools

CATEGORY	n	%
I Faculty Cooperation	21	24.71
II Curriculum Features	13	15.29
III Working Conditions	12	14.12
IV Personal Directions	10	11.76
V Community Support	7	8.24
VI Family Support	7	8.24
VII Desire To Help Youths	6	7.06
VIII Faculty Attitude & Enthusiasm	6	7.06
IX Moral Obligation & Religious Support	3	3.53
TOTAL	85	100.00

TABLE 2

Discouraging Categories of Professional Satisfactions in Middle School

	CATEGORY	n	%
I	Working Conditions	176	27.18
II	Professional Prestige	147	22.44
III	Student Behavior	113	17.25
IV	Classroom Administration	73	11.15
V	Materials and Equipment	60	9.16
VI	Administration	25	3.82
VII	Job Stress	18	2.75
VIII	Miscellaneous	16	2.44
IX	Scheduling and Curriculum	12	1.83
X	Communication	6	.92
XI	New Certification	5	.76
XII	Collective Bargaining	2	.31
	TOTAL	655	100.00

TABLE 3

Response Elements as Components of

Discouraging Working Conditions*

1. Teachers can't handle disadvantaged kids.
2. Teachers are frustrated with the lack of disciplinary action taken by administrators.
3. Schools are demanding and stressful places to work.
4. There is less discipline or disciplinary support now, and more questioning of authority. Discipline is a big problem.
5. Teachers are neither respected nor appreciated by parents, administrators and/or students.
6. Education is not the first priority for families today.
7. Principals have the backbone of a jellyfish.
8. Teachers are not treated as professionals.
9. Teachers are called names and slurred too many times.
10. Paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. Too much after-school work.
11. Teachers shoulder too many responsibilities and perform overwhelming number of nonteaching activities.
12. Teachers have no planning periods.
13. Inadequate supplies
14. Teachers are "slaves" to the children, and are expected to be responsible to minors at all times.
15. Burnout due to the lack of rewards or pats on the back.
16. Teachers and administrators are afraid of kids; and have to be attorneys to discipline students.

* Adapted from "A Qualitative Critique of Teacher Labor Market Studies" (Berry et al., 1985, pp. 106-107)